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General debate on national experience in population matters: fertility, reproductive health and development

Statement submitted by Advocates for Youth, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2011/1.

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Statement*

1. On the 12th of August 2010 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming this year The International Year of Youth.[1] Aware of the responsibilities accompanying this decision, we take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of sexual and reproductive rights and health for all young people and the importance of including them meaningfully in decision-making processes.

2. Nearly half of the world's population — nearly 3 billion people — are under the age of 25. About 85 per cent of the world's youth live in developing countries. The Programme of Action recognizes that all individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and to do so free of discrimination, coercion and violence. The facts tell us that there is still much left to achieve:

- Complications during pregnancy or childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 in developing countries.[2]
- About 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 give birth every year.[3]
- It is estimated that almost half of the maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion in the developing regions are young women aged 24 and under.[4]
- Young people, 15 to 24 years old, accounted for 40 per cent of all new HIV infections worldwide in 2008.[5]
- Every day, 2,500 more young people get infected and globally there are more than 5.7 million young people living with HIV/AIDS.[6]
- Only 40 per cent of all young people have the accurate information to protect themselves from HIV infection.[7]

3. Young people are not only a demographic category; they are the future. It is a fact that young people are sexually active and have the right to be informed about choices regarding sexuality.

4. Therefore we urge the following actions to be taken immediately:

(a) **Youth Empowerment**: Empower young people to demand their rights related to gender equality; rights for women and men to have control over and decide freely and responsibly matters related to their sexuality and reproduction, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, based on mutual consent, equal relationships between women and men, full respect of the integrity of the person and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences;

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* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

[1] Resolution 64/134.

[2] UNFPA: No Woman Should Die Giving Life Factsheet 2010.

[3] WHO. Why is giving special attention to adolescents important for achieving Millennium Development Goal 5? Fact Sheet WHO/MPS/08.14, 2008.

[4] WHO. Unsafe abortion: global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2003. Fifth edition. 2007 p. 19.

[5] International Year of Youth Health and Young People Factsheet 2010.

[6] WHO Factsheet No. 345 Young People: Health Risks and Solutions August 2010.

[7] Report to the High Level Event on HIV and AIDS, 2008.

(b) **Comprehensive Sexuality Education**: Acknowledge young people's right to information by promoting evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education and counselling, both in and out of school. Effective sexuality education must go beyond biology and include information about sexual and reproductive health, including condoms and other contraceptive services and commodities; gender equality; healthy and positive aspects of sexuality; relationships; gender-based and sexual violence; gender diversity; healthy emotive processes; human rights; and anti-discrimination.[8] It should create structured opportunities for young people to explore their attitudes and values, and to practice decision-making and other life skills they will need to be able to make free and informed choices about their sexual lives;

(c) **Youth-friendly Services**: Ensure that youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services safeguard the right of young people to privacy, confidentiality, respect, and informed consent. Such information and services should include access to evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education and counselling, and information and services on sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, contraception and family planning services and commodities, pregnancy, and safe abortion. Design customized integrated sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS programmes and services for youth and adolescents that are based on their expressed needs, especially including youth living with HIV. Eliminate legal barriers that restrict young people's access to essential services, such as parental and spousal consent, age of consent and issues of confidentiality;

(d) **Diversity**: Acknowledge and respect the diversity among young people, including but not limited to sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, education level, and experience. Promote and support youth-specific research, age- and gender-disaggregated data and the development of programmes, together with young people, that take these criteria into account. Work to eliminate discriminatory policies and harmful traditional practices against young people, and in particular young women, girls and LGBTQI;

(e) **Youth Participation**: Ensure that young people, including in- and out-of-school, disabled, and displaced youth, are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives. Invest in young people through mentoring programmes, capacity-building initiatives and equal youth-adult partnerships;

(f) **ICPD and beyond**: Support the initiative made during the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly to further the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action beyond 2014. Participate in the special session during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly and recommit to these goals and objectives at the highest political level.

5. Only if these actions are taken, can young people lead healthy lives of which sexuality is a positive and enjoyable aspect.

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[8] Ibid., §§ 21-23 and 60, 63.